

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 309953

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, GE, US

SUBJECT: JEWISH CLAIMS AGAINST THE GDR

1. RABBI IZRAEL MILLER, PAST PRESIDENT OF THE CONFERENCE OF PRESIDENTS OF MAJOR JEWISH ORGANIZATIONS AND REPRESENTATIVES OF SEVERAL OTHER JEWISH ORGANIZATIONS MET WITH DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY VINE ON DECEMBER 21 TO DISCUSS THE CURRENT SITUATION REGARDING THE EFFORTS OF THE CONFERENCE OF JEWISH MATERIAL CLAIMS TO OBTAIN A SETTLEMENT WITH THE GDR. BENJAMIN FERENCZ OF THE CONFERENCE WAS AMONG THOSE ATTENDING.

2. RABBI MILLER NOTED THAT THE ISSUE OF JEWISH CLAIMS HAS BEEN DRAGGING ALONG FOR OVER TWO YEARS SINCE THE US

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RECOGNIZED THE GDR. AT THE TIME RELATIONS WERE ESTABLISHED, THE JEWISH ORGANIZATIONS HAD BEEN VERY ENCOURAGED BY THE USG'S INSISTENCE THAT THE GDR AGREE TO DESIGNATE AN ORGANIZATION TO DISCUSS JEWISH CLAIMS WITH THE CONFERENCE ON JEWISH MATERIAL CLAIMS AS A PREREQUISITE FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF BILATERAL RELATIONS. NOW, HOWEVER,

THE CONCERNED JEWISH ORGANIZATIONS BELIEVE THAT THE TIME HAS COME FOR MORE DIRECT AND ACTIVE USG INVOLVEMENT IN TRYING TO OBTAIN A SETTLEMENT, SINCE THE RECENT ONE MILLION DOLLAR OFFER TO THE CONFERENCE HAD BEEN REJECTED BECAUSE OF ITS TOTAL INADEQUACY. RABBI MILLER ADDED THAT HE AND HIS COLLEAGUES HAD BEEN DISTURBED BY THE RECENT ANNOUNCEMENT THAT US PORTS HAD BEEN OPENED TO GDR SHIPS AND THAT THE GDR PLANNED TO PURCHASE LARGE AMOUNTS OF US GRAIN. IN THE OPINION OF THE JEWISH ORGANIZATIONS, THESE DEVELOPMENTS REPRESENTED THE KIND OF PROGRESS IN BILATERAL RELATIONS WHICH THEY HAD THOUGHT THE DEPARTMENT HAD COMMITTED ITSELF TO AVOID UNTIL A SETTLEMENT HAD BEEN REACHED ON JEWISH CLAIMS.

2. MR. VINE STRESSED THE DEEP AND CONTINUING USG INTEREST IN SEEING THE CONFERENCE ACHIEVE A SATISFACTORY SETTLEMENT WITH THE GDR. THE USG HAS EXPRESSED OUR CONCERN TO THE GDR MANY TIMES AT ALL LEVELS ON THIS ISSUE. HOWEVER, IT HAS NEVER BEEN THE STATED OR IMPLICIT POLICY OF THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE TO LINK PROGRESS IN TRADE AND OTHER AREAS WITH THE SUCCESSFUL RESOLUTION OF JEWISH CLAIMS. THIS POINT HAD BEEN MADE CLEAR BY ASSISTANT SECRETARY HARTMAN IN HIS MEETING WITH RABBI MILLER IN APRIL OF THIS YEAR (STATE 083571). VINE EMPHASIZED THAT, IN THE DEPARTMENT'S VIEW, IT IS EXTREMELY DIFFICULT TO ACHIEVE QUICK RESULTS IN DEALING WITH THE GDR ON MOST ISSUES AND THAT IT WOULD SEEM THAT MORE TIME AND EFFORT SHOULD BE DEVOTED BY THE CONFERENCE IN ITS DRIVE TO REACH A SETTLEMENT. TO THE DEPARTMENT, THE GDR OFFER REPRESENTED A SIGNIFICANT BREAKTHROUGH, REGARDLESS OF WHETHER OR NOT

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THE AMOUNT WAS TOO SMALL.

4. MR. FERENCZ NOTED THAT IT APPEARS THAT THE CONFERENCE HAS NO FURTHER CARDS TO PLAY AGAINST THE GDR BY ITSELF, NOW THAT THE GDR OFFER HAD BEEN FORMALLY REJECTED. IT WOULD HAVE BEEN USEFUL HAD THE CONFERENCE KNOWN THE EXACT AMOUNT OF THE GDR'S OFFER IN ADVANCE, BUT IT PROBABLY WOULD HAVE MADE LITTLE DIFFERENCE ON THE OUTCOME OF HIS DISCUSSIONS IN EAST BERLIN, ANYWAY. FERENCZ EXPRESSED SOME CONCERN THAT AMBASSADOR COOPER, ON BEING INFORMED OF THE GDR OFFER BY ERICH HONECKER, DID NOT IMMEDIATELY RESPOND THAT IT WAS TOO SMALL. MR. VINE EXPLAINED THAT NEITHER THE AMBASSADOR NOR THE DEPARTMENT WAS IN A POSITION TO PASS JUDGEMENT ON THE ADEQUACY OF THE AMOUNT OFFERED AND DID NOT BELIEVE THAT THE US SHOULD GET DIRECTLY INVOLVED IN THIS ASPECT OF THE ISSUE.

5. TURNING TO WHAT COULD BE DONE NEXT, RABBI MILLER ASKED WHETHER THE DEPARTMENT WOULD BE PREPARED TO ENTER INTO DIRECT NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE GDR ON JEWISH CLAIMS. SUCH NEGOTIATIONS WOULD BE SEPARATE FROM AND EARLIER THAN THE EVENTUAL INTERGOVERNMENTAL NEGOTIATIONS ON PROPERTY CLAIMS. EVEN IF THIS WOULD NOT BE ADVISEABLE, THE CONFERENCE WAS LOOKING FOR A WAY TO ESTABLISH "MEANINGFUL CONTACT" WITH THE GDR AND INDICATED THAT A GOLDMANN-HONECKER MEETING MIGHT BE FRUITFUL. HOWEVER, BOTH MILLER AND FERENCZ WERE SKEPTICAL ABOUT THE CHANCES FOR SUCH A MEETING TO OCCUR.

6. RABBI MILLER AGAIN EXPRESSED THE VIEW OF THE JEWISH ORGANIZATIONS THAT SOMETHING SHOULD BE DONE BY THE USG, PERHAPS WITHHOLDING THE EXCHANGE OF TECHNOLOGY WITH THE EAST GERMANS. SUCH A TACTIC WOULD BE A USEFUL BARGAINING CHIP IN TRYING TO GET A SETTLEMENT. ANOTHER THING WHICH THE USG COULD DO TO SHOW ITS COMMITMENT TO CONFIDENTIAL

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THE CLAIMS ISSUE WOULD BE TO APPOINT ONE OFFICER TO BE RESPONSIBLE FOR FOLLOWING THE ISSUE OF JEWISH CLAIMS AND TO SERVE AS A LIASON BETWEEN THE DEPARTMENT AND THE CONFERENCE. MR. VINE RESPONDED THAT WE DID NOT BELIEVE THAT THE LINKAGE IDEA WOULD BE ADVISABLE AND THAT THE QUESTION OF DIRECT INTERGOVERNMENTAL NEGOTIATIONS WOULD REQUIRE A POLITICAL DECISION. HOWEVER, WE DO NOT THINK THAT IT IS YET TIME TO ADDRESS THIS. WE WOULD BE PREPARED TO HAVE THE NEXT AMBASSADOR TO BERLIN RAISE THE QUESTION OF A HONECKER-GOLDMANN MEETING DURING THE AMBASSADOR'S FIRST MEETING WITH HONECKER. AS FOR THE SUGGESTION THAT AN OFFICER BE ASSIGNED TO HANDLE JEWISH CLAIMS, VINE POINTED OUT THAT THIS ISSUE WAS ALREADY BEING MONITORED CAREFULLY WITHIN THE DEPARTMENT AND IT WOULD NOT SEEM NECESSARY OR BUREAUCRATICALLY CONVENIENT TO HAVE SOMEONE DETAILED FULL TIME TO THIS PROBLEM. VINE AGREED, HOWEVER, TO CONSIDER THE IDEA FURTHER.

7. AT THE CONCLUSION OF THE MEETING, IT WAS AGREED THAT BOTH THE DEPARTMENT AND THE JEWISH ORGANIZATIONS WOULD CONSIDER POSSIBLE NEXT STEPS IN ADDITION TO THOSE DISCUSSED. IN ANY CASE, VINE ASSURED RABBI MILLER THAT THE CHANGE IN ADMINISTRATION WOULD NOT CAUSE AN INTERRUPTION IN THE CONTINUITY OF THE DEPARTMENT'S HANDLING OF THE JEWISH CLAIMS ISSUE AND ADDED THAT THE PUBLIC RECORD WAS CLEAR THAT THE USG STANDS FIRMLY DEDICATED TO THE PRINCIPLE THAT THE GDR SHOULD PROVIDE COMPENSATION TO VICTIMS OF NAZISM.

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